

# passover



## A lesbian feminist approach

By Suzi W.

The Jewish holiday of Passover is a festival of liberation, commemorating the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and their newfound freedom. The seder -- the traditional Passover meal -- revolves around an elaborate retelling of the events leading up to the Exodus, and participants are enjoined to imagine they were there -- to feel in their hearts the change of status from slave to free man.

The tradition says "man" and means it, and this kind of language makes some women want to turn their backs on the whole experience. But Passover offers us a great chance to ritualize and honor the personal and communal struggles for freedom of Jewish women, especially lesbians -- as well as the struggles of other oppressed groups. Parallels between the Israelites' journey and ours are not hard to draw.

In feminist seders I have hosted and shared in over the past years, there have been many changes in the

traditional order of events, thanks to many women, some of whom I only know through their writings. A small number of feminist haggadahs (the book used during the seder) are available sometimes in women's bookstores. (I'll have some on display at Temple Sinai's Festival of Jewish Culture April 13.) Some of the changes relating particularly to liberation follow. Although the language speaks primarily of women, it can be, and has been, adapted easily to include gay men.

First, ask each person coming to your seder to bring something to contribute to the telling: a poem, a photograph, a song, a story to share. If you go to someone else's seder, go prepared to contribute. It is essential that Jewish women reclaim our right to participate and begin to feel comfortable with how much we know or don't know. Some of us are intimidated in Jewish environments as in no other.

Many feminist seders open with the

short poem by Hannah Senesh, a Hungarian resistance fighter who was captured behind enemy lines and executed in 1944.

*Blessed is the match consumed in lighting flames.  
Blessed is the flame that burns in the secret places of the heart.  
Blessed is the heart with strength to throb its last beat in dignity.  
Blessed is the match consumed in lighting flames.*

In the traditional seder, a cup of wine is filled for the prophet Elijah. In some feminist seders, a cup is filled for Miriam, too (or instead). Miriam is Moses' sister, who led the women in singing and dancing after the crossing of the Red Sea. In the haggadah I put together, we read:

*Our legends hold that Elijah comes to earth now and then to help those in need. Because we cannot be sure that Elijah would respond to the needs of women, we have created a symbol of*

*continued, page 8*